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Research Engrosses Mrs. Mary Defnet

Mary began her serious genealogy work about 10 years ago, starting with information about her great-grandfather, Felix Lurquin, who had been city marshall of Fort Howard.

She works on her hobby almost every day now. "I used to put it aside, but I can't any more. It has gotten to me," she says with a smile. "You get so involved. You can go to the courthouse and work three or four hours instead of the one you thought you would spend there."

Because most of her ancestors lived in this area, Mary has found she can learn much from the Brown County Courthouse. The census records from 1850 and beyond have been a big help. Before 1850, only the head of the household was recorded, so these earlier records offer no help in seeking wives and children.

"For me, the easiest part has been getting information from my own family, as well as the work in the courthouse," she points out.

Besides working on her own family, Mary has searched back to 1714 in Belguim for ancestors of her husband, John. Someday, she hopes to go to Europe to see some of the places she is learning about.

Most genealogists have found research in a foreign country to be challenging but interesting. Mary terms a detailed map of Belguim one of her best assets, as it enables her to locate small towns easily.

She is having more trouble researching French ancestors who reported they had come from "around Cologne." This could be anywhere 100 to 200 miles from that city, Mary points out, but she doesn't have the exact location.

"If I could write specifically to one place it would help," she says. "A lot of people are cooperative in sending information.

"They often do appreciate it if you send them a little cash. You can't expect them to work for nothing and research is very time-consuming."

Mary has found it helpful to work with others who share her interest in genealogy. "When there are people doing the same thing you can share information. This is especially true if you can find someone who is tracing the same family.

"It is working with each other that is important," she continues. "Since I have joined the genealogy group I have found a lot of different ways of working.

"When you are on your own you can run into a brick wall, but someone else may have an idea."

She advocates "the old basic rule–start with yourself." Beginners sometimes get overwhelmed with information if they don't work systematically, she has found.